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## ANCIENT PUEBLO AND MEXICAN WATER SYMBOL

By J. WALTER FEWKES

The student of designs on ancient Pueblo pottery cannot fail to recognize two forms of decoration, known as the linear and the conventionalized animal forms. These sometimes grade into each other, but as a rule they can readily be distinguished. Among the problems before the student of our southwestern archeology there is none more important than the discovery of the meaning of these forms of decoration. Areas characterized by special symbols can be determined, and thus the Southwest may be divided into ceramic zones indicative of local centers of art development.

Linear figures on old Pueblo pottery vary but little in different regions of the Pueblo country. Geometrical figures of the same types are found on ceramic vessels from cliff-houses of southern Colorado and of central New Mexico, and they are repeated with startling identity on pottery from the Hopi ruins and from the Gila valley. They occur with little change on the more modern specimens as well as on the ancient, and are not limited to our Southwest but extend into the northern states of Mexico. The fact that these geometrical designs are so widely distributed, as compared with specialized symbols of animals confined to constricted areas, and the evidences of their great age, tell strongly in support of a belief in the former homogeneity of Pueblo art, indicating that the Pueblo culture in the Southwest was more uniform in ancient times than after these local differences had developed in the relatively modern period.

The great multitude of these widely spread linear figures may be classified in a few types for comparative study.

One of the best defined of these types is the straight line encircling a bowl or vase but broken at one or more points. At first glance it might be supposed that this break was an imperfec-

tion or that the potter had failed, without purpose, to connect the extremities of the line; but closer examination and comparison

show that it was intentional. This break had a meaning which will not now be considered.

A similar break occurs in geometrical designs on Pueblo pottery which are more complicated, where curved or spiral lines replace the straight ones. It occurs also in rectangular meanders, so abundant in the ruins within the Zuñi ceramic zone. In examples of spirals the figure consists of two lines or bands, one generally broader than the other, parallel with each other, and with their central ends close together but not joining. The interval between these extremities corresponds to the break in the straight line mentioned above. A similar condition is true of meanders, the many modifications in which may be made out by a little study.



FIG. 10.—Native Mexican picture showing water symbols.

this type of geometrical decoration on Pueblo pottery has not been satisfactorily determined, but the spiral is generally interpreted by the modern Hopi of Arizona as signifying whirling wind or water. A confirmation of this interpretation, as regards the

latter element, is found in a few old paintings made by a Mexican Indian. This evidence seemed to me so important that I briefly mentioned it in my report on the ruins of the ancient Hopi pueblo of Sikyatki.<sup>1</sup> It deserves more attention than I gave to it at that time, and on this account I have made it the basis of this brief article.

In commemoration of the discovery of America by Columbus the Mexican government published, in 1892, a collection of important codices and Indian pictures accompanied with text by Dr Alfredo Chavero.<sup>2</sup> Besides the codices, this publication contains a reproduction of the Lienzo de Tlaxcala, a series of pictures by a native artist illustrating the conquest of Mexico by Cortes.

Three plates (17-18, 18 *bis*) of this series furnish significant information regarding the symbolism of simple and double spiral and rectangular meanders in Mexican pictures. The likeness of these symbols to designs on ancient Pueblo pottery corroborates the Hopi explanation of their meaning. The artist has represented in these plates, two of which are evidently parts of one drawing, canals or water-



FIG. 11.—Design from an old Pueblo vase, showing water symbols.

ways on which are figures of boats with warriors attacking the Spaniards. These canals are covered with rectangular and spiral figures painted in light green, which are evidently symbols of water. The accompanying illustrations (figures 10, 11), which show a section of one of these canals and a design from an old Pueblo vase collected by Dr Walter Hough, bring out clearly the identity of form in these symbols. As there can hardly be a doubt that the Mexican artist intended to represent water by these designs, it may be concluded that the Pueblo potter, unless she was a copy-

<sup>1</sup> *Seventeenth Annual Report of the Bureau of American Ethnology*, p. 569.

<sup>2</sup> *Antigüedades Mexicanas, publicadas por la Junta Columbina de Mexico*, Mexico, 1892.

ist who used symbols the meaning of which had been lost, had the same thought in mind when she painted identical figures on her pottery. Although it is possible that the same symbol may have had different meanings in the two regions, it is highly improbable that such was the case.